/18 cont./

III.

Education -- The Educated -- The Educators

565 While the upper class in Abkhazia enjoyed privilege and
566 power, the situation of the lower classes was one of great oppression; /19/ the batoni (master, feudal lord) looked upon his subject, his slave, as a commodity; he could sell or pawn him
[567] according to circumstances. However, even after the abolition of slavery, the position of the peasantry did not improve, due to
[579] the fact that the nobility did not cease from robbery and pillage and plunder until the most recent times.

565 Under such a state of affairs, all the peasantry could do
608 was to resign itself to feudal conditions and try, wherever possible, to get protection. The best method lay in the custom of adoption, or the rearing of the sons of the aristocrats by the peasants. Thanks to this custom, the aristocrats themselves were strengthened, for in this way they gained in the peasants their most faithful supporters, while at the same time freeing their wives from the onerous duty of bringing up and feeding their own children. This is the reason that in all Abkhazia there is not a single peasant who has not reared one or several princes and nobles; as a consequence of this custom, hardly one per cent of the nobles have been nursed at their own mother's breast.

Before the beginning of childbirth in a family of the aristocracy (didebuli), on the one hand relatives and acquaintances and, on the other hand, the future foster-mothers of the expected child, accompanied by their husbands and female relatives in order to be able to bear the newborn foster-child back to their village with due ceremony, begin to gather around the pregnant
844 woman. During the childbirth, girls from the village also come to
565 visit the expectant mother in order to distract her and to relieve
[533] her sufferings during labor with gay songs and the telling of fables
[538] and fairy tales. The husband is absent during this time. According to the customs of the country, he is not allowed to be present when his wife gives birth and therefore leaves the home. Above